PROMOTING RURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS IN NORTHERN IRAQ

By

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Northern Iraq: An unstable history

- Ethnic diversity
  - Populations instability and conflicts
- Chronic neglect
  - Lack of infrastructures on natural resources
    - electricity
    - Water storage
    - productive projects, etc.
- Decentralization tendency
  - Hostility against the central government
    - Destruction of existing infrastructure as a revenge attitude
Social problems

- A lot of disabled people because of the wars
- Refugees: multiple waves (1961, 1970s, 1990s, 2000s)
  - Consequences:
    - Adapted to the city lifestyle and don’t want to become farmers again
    - Don’t or no longer have the traditional know-how
    - Intensive rural exodus: Young people are attracted by cities
    - Expensive rental in Irbil: 8 times salary levels
- Language problems between Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, Armenian, etc.
- Land tenure problems between Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen and Christians
  - Collective lands

Income generation: A political issue

- Hidden unemployment
  - 80% of the national budget goes to the public service (army, teachers, gardiens, etc.)
  - Monthly salary of 242,000 Iraqi dinars
disincentive for agricultural employment
  - Overloads the national budget without direct productivity gains
  - Attractive for young people
  - Reduction in the motivation to build capacities in the production sectors, including agriculture.
Supporting Refugees

• Refugees are living on government subsidies:
  – 50,000-100,000 dinars monthly per family.
  – The needs are 5-6 times more.

• Meanwhile,
  – Labor cost is expensive
  – In agriculture = 20,000-25,000 dinars/day
  – (US$1 around 1,200 Iraqi Dinars)

What are the alternatives?

Challenges:
• No industry
• No tourism
• Few initiatives of immigrants powerful people
  – Capitals from abroad needs stability
• Country surrounded by big producers:
  – Iran, Turkey and Syria with cheaper production costs
• The country imports almost everything

➢ Focus is thus on agriculture in rural and remote areas
Status of the Agricultural Sector

- Added value crops and commercial crop cultivation are underdeveloped.
  - Possible to work on a greater number of farmers and families
  - Potential to promote import substitution and reduce reliance on imports
- Energy cost expensive for pumping and other agricultural uses
- Electricity outside working hours (16h00-24h00 in some rural areas)
- Distance from the market for fresh products; lack of capacity for storage and transport
- Public refrigeration services not used
- Lack of food processing units

Constraints to Agricultural Development

- Monopole in some agricultural production sectors
  - Rainfed crops (cereals and pulses) where we can produce vegetables and fruit trees.
- Lack of know-how on cultivation of added value crops
- Lack of mechanization
  - Most of the work is manual
  - In some villages, we can not find even a tractor
- Neglect of existing potential
  - Small Size Dams with holding capacities of tens of thousands of m³, but are not being utilized
- Forest are still used unsustainably for wood and fuel
Unsustainable Farming Practices

• Wheat monoculture
• Agri-business of wheat gives 50% of the selling price to the land owners:
  – Farmers (owners) are receiving a percentage depending on the rate of land
  – Good sharing of the production
• But there are socio-agronomic problems:
  – Few people are engaged in the agricultural process
  – In the village, only 1-2 farmers are cultivating the whole area
  – Low adding value
  – Low prices and profits
  – Farmers are simply land owners, not producers

Natural Resources Potential

• Diversity of the ecosystems
  – Mountainous
  – Plains and flat lands
  – Rain fall 400-1000 mm per year
  – Few days of frost during the winter
  – Water wealth during dry season
  – Suitable climate for diverse production
  – Low density of villages in the area
• Emerging oil industry is affording more funds for agriculture development to support economic diversification processes.
Needs

- Long term political stability
- Infrastructure
  - Water networking for improved water use efficiency
- New crop varieties that make good use of available water resources
- Value chain development
- Marketing support
- Capacity building on used of adapted and appropriate technologies
- Sustainable approach in order to improve livelihood without destroying the environment

Recommendations

- Focus on **vegetables** since they are of high added value compared to cereals
- Focus on **fruit trees** since the area is mountainous suitable for good fruit quality
- Focus on **fisheries**
- Focus on **dairy products**
- Focus on **fodder** production through irrigation since it increases the production
Current Initiatives Underway

• Diverse agricultural regional companies are active in the area (Turkish, Lebanese, Syrian, etc.)
• New technologies, know-how are being introduced
  – Extension of heated greenhouses: Are being located in the lower areas, not the high lands because of the snow and the risk of frost
• Improvement of pulses and cereals production
  – Improvement of varieties
  – Introduction of complementary watering schemes
• Questionable if sustainability is a priority in private sector business development initiatives

New Project Methodology (short term)

• Collective work in selected villages of varied potential
• Collaboration with a selected number of candidates in each village
• Selection and collaboration modalities are not an easy job
• Establishment of Demonstration Fields for the:
  – Improvement and introduction of sustainable agronomic practices
  – Import of adapted high value crops (strawberry, peach, cherry, apple, etc) and of adapted varieties
  – Introduction of trickle irrigation for a better water use efficiency
  – Training of trainers and of farmers in the surrounding areas
    • Production of training material and technical guides in the local languages
• Collaboration with local authorities in the field of agricultural extension & infrastructure development
  – Refrigeration for products of fruit trees, building dams to support the villages, etc,
Intended Beneficiaries

- Local farmers are associated directly in the programmed activities:
  - They will increase their income generation
  - They will help to showcase demonstrative case studies
- The surrounding belt of farmers will be provided with training and targeted candidates for further assistance.
  - Training focused on transfer of best agronomic practices and sustainability tools

Project: Medium term goals

- Promoting individual projects in the agricultural sector, once know-how is acquired
- More focus on use of appropriate technologies through adapted mechanization
- More focus on strengthening the value chain, food processing and marketing.
Conclusions

- There is a potential for poverty alleviation through sustainable agricultural development by enhancing human capacity, infrastructure and technology, as called for in the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA).
- Existing farming systems need improvement.
- Capacity building is a key factor.
- Sustainable use of the natural resources in the main challenge.
- Progress requires a long-term, multi-disciplinary process and commitment.

Thank you